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Lifelong Learning in a Cross-Border Setting: the Case of Hungary and Romania. A Quest of Concepts, Data and Research

Introduction

The aim of this paper is (a) to re-define the concept of “Learning Region” (LR) according to the necessities of an East-Central European CBR (cross-border region), and (b) to study the ways and means by which the concept might be statistically measured and cartographically presented. The present paper is a follow-up of the former theoretical considerations about LR. The authors make an attempt to operationalise their former views in order to study it empirically and to measure it statistically. First, we summarise the possible definitions of LR. Second, we look for alternative approaches for the empirical research of LRs. And third, we introduce our first results of an empirical study of a spatial unit of the Bihar–Bihor Euroregion (a CB region between Hungary and Romania).

A quest for conceptualisation

In the following section we group the various concepts and approaches of LR. It is not a systematic analysis of the existing literature. Rather, it is an attempt to typify them.

Geographical, political and educational understandings

We have studied the concept and its applicabilities in some of our former papers. In one of their papers (Kozma, 2009, 2010a, 2010b, 2011) differentiated between three approaches to the concept. They are: LR as a concept coming from the development of economic geography (Abicht, 1994; Florida, 1995; Hudson, 1999; Illeris & Jakobsen, 1990; Lernende Regions, 1994; Morgan, 1997; OECD, 1993; Ohmae, 1993; Regional Advantage, 1994); LR as an LLL (lifelong learning) concept (Baumfeld, 2005; Learning Regions by EU Countries) and LR as a political concept (Boekema, Morgan, Bakkers

& Rutten, 2000; CERI, 2000; Hassink, 2004; Lukesch & Payer, 2009; OECD, 2001).

According to the literature reviewed, LR as a concept of economic geography (called otherwise social or human geography) stresses a new way of analyzing regional development. That is: the importance of education and training in the revitalisation of a given region. The problem of the restructuring of a stagnating region arose back in the 1970s and 1980s. However, the chance of their development by new and innovative ways came as late as the 1990s. Many of the regional statistical analyses proved that regional development and knowledge production go hand in hand, and the growing networks of knowledge production, industrial (or agricultural) innovation create cores of regional developments (Abich, 1994; Florida, 1995; Hudson, 1999; Illeris & Jakobsen, 1990; Lernende Regions, 1994; Morgan, 1997; OECD, 1993; Ohmae, 1993; Regional Advantage, 1994).

LR as an LLL concept connects to this new understanding. From an LLL point of view, “knowledge production” and the emerging cooperation between industrial enterprises and R+D institutions (universities and/or non-formal places of education and training) are ideal places and an optimal situations for LLL. All the more, regional frameworks – rather than larger territorial units – seem to be the appropriate organisational frames for organising and developing LLL activities. From this point on, some of the theorists of LLL felt, that LR is nothing but the geographical conceptualisation of the idea of LLL (Baumfeld, 2005; Learning Regions by EU Countries).

LR as a political concept, however, stresses the social drift and political motivation behind regional development. According to this approach, LR (as the cooperation between actors of economy, research and education) depends on the political engagements and dedications of the human factor, that is, the political forces behind the development. It is not the sizes of the networks or the degree of economic production which counts; rather the political forces that are initiating and directing the development of a given region. LLL is, according to this view, a form of the political will; and the regional economic development – at large or small scale – is the product of that will (Boekema, Morgan, Bakkers & Rutten, 2000; CERI, 2000; Hassink, 2004; Lukesch & Payer, 2009; OECD, 2001).

Large scale vs. small scale approaches

In their latest paper (Erdei et al., 2011), follow the same line. They differentiate between two definitions of LR. The economical approach is appropriate to the study of those regions where massive industrial developments are associated with research, innovation and education; thus, creating a core in the development of a country or a region. This approach is quite different from the other, which concentrates on smaller units (be them even a cluster of quite

few communities) and studies them from the point of view of political forces. It is not the level of economic development that counts, but the level of political will and social forces. In this approach, LR is a political rather than economic concept.

Going further, Kozma (2011) interprets LR as a political rather than economic concept. According to his view, LR may be a special way out of regional stagnation. According to his concept, globalised universities may serve the global economy; however, they fail to meet the local needs of the regional/local societies. Continuing on this global–local distinction, the author stresses the new possible function in the local LLL systems and institutions. That is, to offer an alternative way of regional development in which it initiates local knowledge production and education (both formal and non-formal) for economic development. This is quite a contrary vision when compared to other known concepts of economic development.

Measuring LR: Some Experiences

There are some experiments that characterise spatial units by the LLL activities of their inhabitants. The following section will introduce some of them and give brief analyses.

Connections between LR and LLL. First, we give a theoretical consideration about the connection between LLL and LR. As mentioned above, we understand the LR concept as an LLL rather than an economic (or human geography) concept. The main feature of LR – according to this understanding is the LLL activities of the members of given communities. LLL activities make a local unit of LR; moreover, it is a guarantee (and a promise) for the political dynamism of that community. This reinterpretation of the original LR concept may be debated – but at least it is embedded in the various ways of interpreting the concept in the literature. In other words, the following section will connect the concept of LR with the concept of LLL, on the basis of which, we may try to “measure” the activities of a given LR.

The following indices try to measure several human activities and not just the activities of organisations or institutions in a given territorial unit. Behind this statistical experiment is an idea about LLL as a common “behaviour” of the members of a community. LLL from this point of view is a collective behaviour, which can actually be measured by statistical means. Two aspects of such behaviour can be approached for statistical analysis: (a) the activities of the community members; and (b) the outcomes of those activities. Formal schooling and its researchers regularly use indices of outcomes to characterise the schooling. The researches of LLL may not use outcome indices so regularly, mainly because LLL has no standards against which the actual performance could be judged. This comes from the informal and non-formal character of the activities called LLL. Yet, we all know that LLL has

outcomes; moreover, the LLL outcomes are essential for the existence of the given community. The outcomes of LLL – which may not be measured by formal schooling means and tools – are partly the well-being and partly the political dynamics of the community. When measuring LLL – both in its activities and its (“non-existing”) outcomes – we may measure the well-being and political dynamics of the community. Let us characterise a territorial community by its well-being and political dynamics – and we may arrive to the concept of LR as introduced in the first section as an alternative interpretation to economic geography.

Now we turn to the practicalities – in the sense of statistical measurements and the possibilities of using them to characterise LR. Two major concepts became known in the LLL literature during the last decade: (a) the Canadian Learning Index, and (b) its European counterpart called the European Lifelong Learning Index.

CLI: the Canadian LLL index. The Canadian LLL index (Composite Learning Index, CLI) history goes back five years. The indices are collected and analysed regularly by the Statistical Office of Canada. They are based partly on community statistics and partly on census data. Both its collection and its analysis has been routinised; the findings of the statistical analysis are interpreted to characterise the state of the arts in Canadian society and the actual situation of lifelong learning in Canada. (In other words, it is not applied to characterise any kind of LR; though it is used to characterise territorial units of the country in order to find differences among them and create development policies on that basis.) Figure 1 presents the structure of the Canadian CLI. Known from the relevant literature, it consists of four “pillars”- in other words, four dimensions by which their indicators can be organised and analysed.

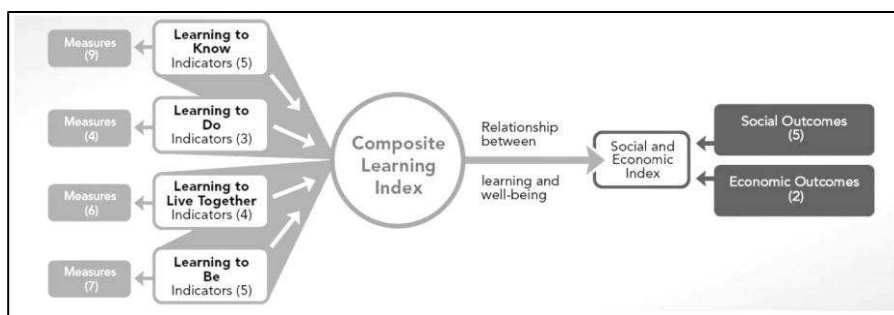


Figure 1: The Canadian CLI

Source: The 2010 Canadian Learning Index

Learning to know is a dimension consisting of statistics relating to the formal (sometimes even non-formal) schooling. It is the dimension of the traditional

understanding of schooling, the “knowledge” dimension. Indicators characteristic of that dimension (or: collected and grouped under this umbrella) cover access to, participation in and leaving from the formal school system. “Access” means, however, “access” other than the statistics known from school and educational statistics. “Access” in the CLI context is characterised by geographical distances (the distances between the home and the institution someone has to cover). In the same way, “participation” is also re-interpreted. It is not characterised by the usual statistics, but by statistics (proportion of cohorts) of taking part in programmes and activities of formal institutions. An unusual set of data is gathered under the name of “youth literacy”; though literacy is understood in the broad sense of the word (scores of reading, math, science and “problem solving”). All in all; the “learning to know” dimension represents institutional as well as personal data; both grouped and interpreted to characterise human activities (and products) rather than organisational aims and accomplishments.

The **learning to do dimension** covers the “competency” side of knowing something (“to know how to do or how to make something”). Here, the usual “training” statistics become re-interpreted. Workplace, job-related and vocational training are three various types of training (which we think and talk of like alternatives). It is a deeper look into the sophisticated field of Education and Vocational Training (VAT). Statistics collected under this cluster are different from the data we usually think of. Statistics of age cohorts, of enterprises and VAT institutions are gathered here to characterise the communities’ access to competences.

The third dimension is referred to as **learning to be**. It is an innovative name for the usual labels “leisure time activities” and statistical data characterising them. It is, however, not only a shift of names; rather a shift of view and approach. It is not “leisure-time” that is indicated, but the non-formal and informal learning activities during “leisure-time” (learning by sports, learning by culture etc.). It cannot be measured (because of the lack of statistical data), but the spending of households can be. All those indicators are measured, therefore, by the data of household spending; including media and the Internet interpret a question still remains as to whether “learning” could be characterised by spending. Questions like this would, however, guide us into further philosophy, which is explained in the handbook of CLI).

The most vulnerable – though most interesting dimension is called **learning to live together**. It is the social dimension of CLI, covering indicators mainly of volunteering. Volunteering is the community side of leisure-time activities; it could otherwise be named as the political dimension of CLI (“political” not in the meaning of party politics, but rather in the meaning of collective actions). The “political” dimension of the CLI covers a whole range of activities from library attendance (how far the libraries are from someone’s home) to spending time and organising activities together with foreigners

(called people from other cultures, not only other countries). It is a range of activities worth further consideration and, of course, statistical analysis as well. (Even if we would feel the indicators and data may not characterise the social dimension of CLI in its full deepness).

ELLI: the European LLL index. The European Lifelong Learning Index has been developed on the basis of the Canadian CLI and can be viewed as a matured version of the latter. The structure of the European CLI is equivalent with the Canadian one, though the names have been simplified, and thus, they are easier to follow. So both the Canadian and the European CLI have four dimensions (“pillars”). They are easy to catch in the European CLI: Learning to know is the common label for indicators of the formal schooling and education system (in the meaning of general rather than professional education, which is a European understanding of schooling and education). Learning to do – contrary to the latter – covers indicators of vocational and job-related learning activities (a European interpretation again of what “learning the competencies” would practically mean). Learning to be is translated as indicators of personal growth; while learning to live together is the common name of indicators for “social cohesion” (the wording clearly comes from the European understanding of the concept).

Dimensions 1 and 2 (learning to know and to do) is easier to feature by indicators, since both the formal and the non-formal (vocational and on-the-job) education may have statistics in Europe. The indicators of ELLI come from the traditional educational statistics; except for data coming from the PISA exercise. (The loss of higher education, or to call it “post secondary” as well as the suggested age group for characterising social participation may be discussed).

More complicated are dimensions 3 and 4 (learning to be and to live together). Their indicators may come from theory / philosophy; while the statistical data are missing or pending. The major dilemma here – as everywhere else – is, that dimensions 3 and 4 would reflect personal or community actions, which may not be recognised statistically (statistics being mostly national in Europe, but those activities are “free” or “volunteer”). Less data exists about the more sensitive and interesting aspects of human activities. “Visiting museums” or “visiting concerts” may be indicated by institutional statistics (that is, the data offered by the museums or concert halls etc). “Work-life balance” (a suggested indicator for dimension 3) however, may hardly be characterized by the “accordance of working hours with family commitments”; since there are no data for that (being itself a theoretical construct).

To feature dimension 4 (learning to live together) is more complicated than dimension 3. The very concept of “living together” is slightly farther away from the European mind; so it is interpreted as the dimension of social cohesion. Although “social cohesion” seems clearer, it is complicated to characterize statistically, since “social cohesion” is, again, a theoretical

construct and does not come from a bunch of existing statistical data. “Tolerance”, “trust” or “inclusion” (among others) may be indicators hard to reflect by using existing data. One would really need opinion poll results or interview analyses to collect any data concerning them. (Further, we would not list the “party memberships” to civic actions; however, it is easy to understand that “civic” activities are not rooted as deeply in the cultures of Europe as they are in heritage of the Canadian culture.

One thing is completely missing from the European CLI. That is the territorial (spatial) dimension. The Canadian CLI is rich in territorial statistics (e.g. characterizing “access” of systems and services by the geographic distance between the institutions and homes). The European counterpart has no mention of it. Here, a theoretical (philosophical) approach dominates the statistical-demographic view of the human and his/her society. “Systems” of education or training seem to be more important than “networks”; “participation” is more characteristic than the “access”. The outcome of such a construct is, as mentioned above: a stronger structure with a much weaker statistical representation. Comparing the two CLIs it becomes clear that the Canadian one has been raised from statistical practices; while its European counterpart is mostly a theoretical construct. As a theoretical frame, the European CLI is much more coherent. As a guide for statistical analysis, the Canadian one gives stronger support. Those who want to build a theoretical construct of how LLL can be understood and analysed may turn to the European construct. Those who are interested in measuring the capacities of the LRs would, however, apply the Canadian CLI.

The German Map of Learning: a change of the concept. The German Map of Learning (Deutscher Lernatlas, DLA) is the recent follow-up of ELLI (Schoof, Blinn, Schleiter, Ribbe & Wiek, 2011). It is, however, not only a follow-up, but rather a change in the concept of ELLI. As mentioned above, ELLI was the first break-through of continental LR and LLL measuring; though it was theoretical enough to be underpinned by the existing data-sets. Theoretically (philosophically) robust, statistical data of the Continent (Europe) were missing needed to be tested, or just to be illustrated. The founding fathers of the initial project have to change their original concept. It would have been interesting – moreover, important – for developing a European view on LLL as part of the European well-being. It would have contributed to the idea that Europe is able to show an alternative way (at least statistically) to the American way of life. Important as it would have been, practicalities made it impossible to develop an ELLI. Since Europe (the European Union) is still a confederation of nation states, national statistics may offer a more secured basis for a statistical analysis. It is the outcome of the change in concept from ELLI to DLA.

The DLA and its authors and project members (by the strong and constant support of the Bertelsmann Foundation) learnt a lot from the Canadian

CLI after which they created the German version of it. The weaknesses of ELLI were omitted during the construction of the German CLI. DLA is based on existing (or mostly existing) official German statistical data. The structure of the data collection and presentation is a simplified version of ELLI (more simple and more visible than the Canadian counterpart). The indicators are well connected to the measures; the dimensions, their “clusters” are easy to follow. The latest publication (Schoof et al., 2011) is rich in data – though a step back and a long way from theory to empirical findings.

The DLA2011 is an important piece to learn and to follow. It proves the importance of a balance between data and theory; both being important and both being necessary for a thorough analysis. It also represents the very differences between the continental (European) and the Atlantic (Canadian) try-outs, both in the existing data and the theoretical frame. As far as data are concerned, DLA2011 shows the sophistication of a European data collection, which is comparable to the Canadian experience and techniques. As far as theory is concerned, the Canadian audience (including politicians and politics) seemed to be more interested in politics than the European audience. The Canadian CLI is a public venture; DLA2011, though, remained (at least by now) a private provision.

For our Romanian-Hungarian experiment, DLA2011 would be more fruitful, since it is Continental (European). However, it has no traditions at present. The Canadian CLI, on the other hand has a tradition with its relatively long history (five years). It is the main reason that we started to apply the Canadian CLI to our Romanian-Hungarian LRs.

Measuring the “adult learning potential”. (Kozma, Híves, Pusztai, Radácsi & Rébay, 2004) contributed to the dispute of evaluating the LLL by an experiment of measuring the “adult learning potential” (ALP). ALP was interpreted as the ability and preparedness of a territorial community to participate in adult learning activities. Though ALP was not equivalent with LLL (the former is rather formal, the latter being formal, non-formal and informal), the concept and the experiment has some significance in two ways. (a) Kozma et al. (ibid) proved that learning in its broad sense can be characterized by demographic sources (based on the census data). Traditional studies used almost all school-based statistics (the number of students and teachers, hours of teaching and learning or the distances from the schools etc.). (b) Measuring ALP territorial differences could be featured; since ALP by its nature showed the learning abilities of territorial communities.

The indicators of ALP in the study were: (a) birth and migration rates of the communities; (b) the level of education and training of their inhabitants; and (c) employment/unemployment. The Hungarian census data of 2001 were used for statistical analysis. The philosophy behind the indicators goes on saying that (a) the demographic data of the Hungarian territorial communities is decreasing, however the level of education and training is increasing

constantly. Territorial and social groups with higher levels of education and training are preferred on the labour market. These processes may go hand in hand in some territories, which may result in a growing interest in adult learning. The ALP of Hungary is presented in Figure 2. It shows that (1) The number of inhabitants in the territorial units of the country is decreasing dramatically (though there are significant differences). The most dramatic changes occur in territories, which had demographic surpluses in the former (1990) census; (2) The level of education is increasing. There seems to be a “qualitative expansion” in education since it is not the number of students but rather the demands for further and higher education that are increasing; (3) The unemployment rate among the inhabitants with a low education level is high, but it is low in territories where the education level is higher. It seems to be especially characteristic in territories with larger capital investments; (4) Territories with decreasing demography and an increasing employment rate may be characterized by higher ALP. It is expected that the inhabitants of those territories may demand more adult learning possibilities in the future to cope with the employment demand of the labour market.

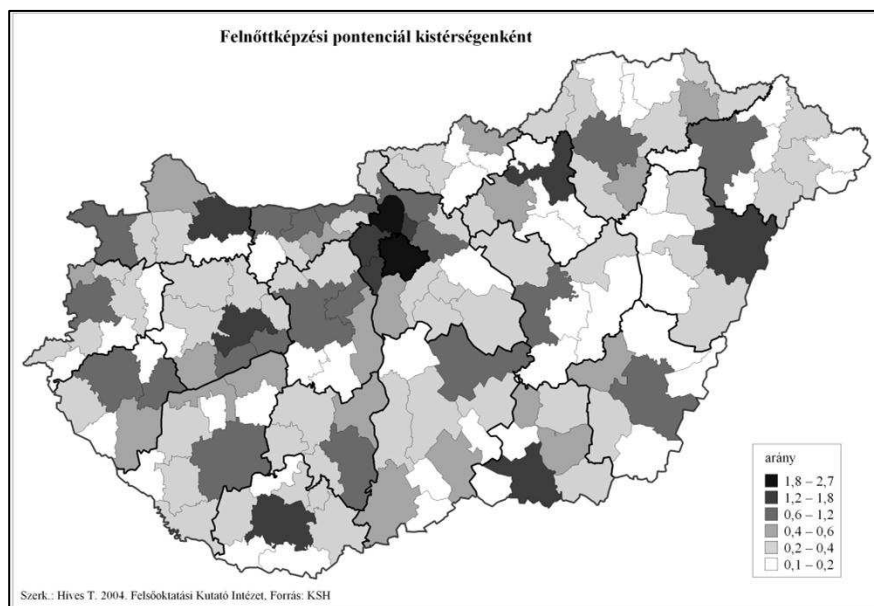


Figure 2: The distribution of ALP in Hungary (census data of territorial units, 2001)

Source: Kozma T et al. (2004). p. 103.

Can LR be measured by LLL indicators? The initial question was to measure – if possible – the LRs by LLL indicators. The study of Kozma et al. (ibid) has no direct relevance for this; though some results might contribute to theoretical

considerations. There are more reasons for applying the Canadian CLI for the empirical studies of LR. One reason is the structure of the statistical data they use. Those data are mostly accessible; they have already been collected by the various statistical agencies. The Canadian data set is more structured and has probably collected data from a wider sphere of social and human life than the Hungarian or the Romanian data. Yet, some of the data – most of them in dimensions 1 and 2 – are available. It provides a possible means of analysis for comparative studies too.

Another reason for applying the Canadian model to the LR study is its sensitivity to spatial data. Spatial data – a view that the human and social life is organised in spatial units and territorial frames – is collected in all of the four dimensions. Characteristic to that are the spatial data of measure indicators like access to the institutions (be them educational, cultural or training institutions). Since LR is defined as territorial units, it is easy to characterize them by using geographic data. The question, however, still remains as to whether those data could be collected in the Hungarian or Romanian context.

These are the pros for the Canadian CLI if applied to an empirical LR study. There are, however, cons, too. The most important is the question of measuring the political dynamics of the territorial units. The Canadian CLI has a dimension, which may help in this sense. By studying this dimension, though, we may realise that the “learning to live together” dimension is as descriptive as the remaining three. It is understandable. Dynamics – setting aside “political” dynamic – are, not easy to characterize with data; and if they are, they can only be characterized by time series. And even time series contain a series of spotlights rather than moving pictures and need historical interpretation. The various activities characterized and measured by the Canadian data might be interpreted as political dynamics, though they are not necessarily that. Political dynamics may be “measured” – better to say, characterized – by case studies from the field. This leads us to the more complicated question (a question of the philosophy of the empirical social research) whether social change can ever be represented by quantitative research.

Studying LR: A Hungarian-Romanian Case

The new understanding of LR as characterised by the political activity of the local society rather than the developmental level of knowledge industry and innovation networks can be applied to a cross-border region of Hungary and Romania. The question still remains if it can be proved statistically. In the following section, we are looking for some possible answers to this question

Statistical models. How can the Canadian and the European LIIs be applied to our LR analysis? A short comparison between their statistical models may help in answering this question (Figure 3).

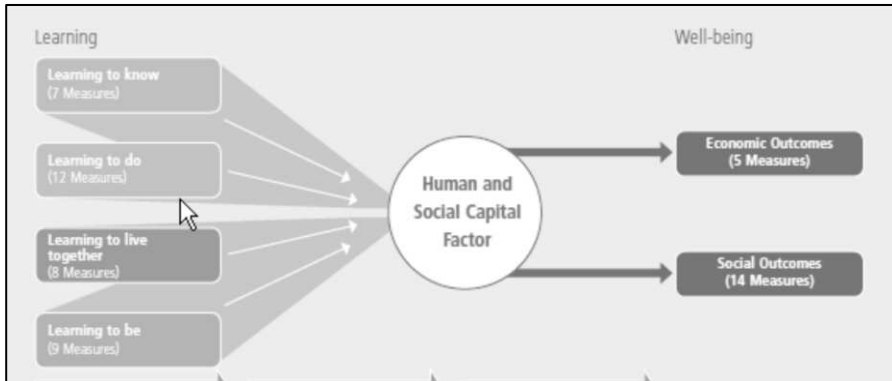


Figure 3: Model of ELLI

Source: http://www.ccl-cca.ca/pdfs/CLI/ELLI_EU_20102608_EN.pdf

The aim of the Canadian pursuit is to develop a learning index, which would enhance various statistical data from the four dimensions mentioned. Each of the dimensions is indicated by groups of 3–5 types of data which, in turn, are measured by 4–7 types of data data. As presented in Figure 3, those data – as a learning index – represent the relationship between learning and well-being. The question of well-being – to which (social) learning (in its various forms) contributes – is a part of the social and economic index of Canada, which is absorbing the economic and social outcomes of Canadian society. The CLI pursuit is part of a broader question of the social statistics, which would reflect the well-being of the Canadians from an alternative point of view; that is, from the point of view of social and economic approaches. The Canadian CLI contributes to a broader view of the society; and as such, to the broader view of the local and regional societies in the country. The main message of this exercise is a broader picture of a given community – be it a regional unit or the country as a whole. One specific aspect of the Canadian CLI is its strong connections to local and regional data, on which the basis of a national picture (the Canadian CLI) are developed.

Compared to the Canadian CLI, the European LLI has been developed in a somewhat different direction. The aim of the European LLI is to represent the connection between learning and well-being, which is a slight shift in the statistical work. The learning indicators could be interpreted as the “social/human capital” factor which, in turn, is influencing the well-being indicators (the values of 19 measures). Opposite to the Canadian CLI, the European LLI understands the learning measures (in the four dimensions

mentioned) as contributions to the development of the social capital that result in the socioeconomic well-being. The European model suggests what we know from the former theoretical literature. Human (social) capital influences the socioeconomic well-being of a given society (or even a continent). It is an illustration of a theoretical frame rather than a construction for statistical data gathering and grouping. The European LLI is easier to use for understanding the nature and the state of the human/social capital of a country. The Canadian CLI is, however, easier to use for data gathering and grouping. Both are models of statistics. The (European) LLL is more theory-oriented and could be applied for various understandings and alternatives to the human/social capital concepts. The other (Canadian) is weaker in its philosophy and more neutral for theoretical understandings. It is, therefore, more applicable when local and regional societies – their developmental levels and civic (political) activities – would be measured.

Considerations on Methods. Doing so we face a series of methodical questions. Here are but a few. (1) The problem of decision-making power. Different statistics use different units for data collection. This is clear when comparing the two. The argument of CLI goes on to say that it is necessary – though sometimes complicated – to go down to the community level; while the CCL (Statistics Canada) stresses only the importance of the “best estimate possible”. DLA2011 also stresses the importance of the level of communities (“Ort”, “Kommune”); though those two concepts differ in their political meanings. The question one has to answer is: which level has the political decision-making power (at least from the LR/LLL point). (2) The problem of the territorial unit: A question – similar to the above mentioned (the question of units) – is the unit of the existing data. As seen in the CLI, sometimes only estimates would be relevant. Various statistical traditions and practices may make it complicated to gather comparative data. (It proved to be the fate – at least the burden – of an ELLI.) A Romanian-Hungarian comparison has to solve the problem of the different units for official data gathering. (3) The problem of the source of data: Both CLI and DLA face a dual problem. The statistical data they use come partly from individuals and partly from institutions (demographic vs. organisational statistics). They reflect partly the situations of the individuals and partly the characteristics of the organisations. How can they match? (Visiting a museum can be an individual decision and thus, may characterize the individual and his / her community. It can also be the characteristics of an organisation, reflecting the success of an exhibition etc.) (4) The problem of data gathering: Statistical data could be collected only from fields where they (the data) exist. Otherwise, we need questionnaires or even personal interviews. Which should be the leading method? How deep can we go into the level of individual interviews for securing the best possible value of the statistics for learning and well-being?

For the sake of the Romanian–Hungarian comparison, we decided to use the settlement (habitat with legal existence) for the level of our data gathering. Though “settlement” means different geographical communities in both countries, it seems to be the only acceptable level for further interpretations. We have to collect data both from individuals and the existing organisations at the given settlement, in order to answer questions concerning individual and collective behaviours. As in every European state (and countries elsewhere in the world), formal and non-formal education and training is better represented by statistics than informal learning activities. For that reason, data for pillars 1 and 2 might be more easily collected; though the question of “access” to organisations and services might be complicated. Data for pillars 3 and 4 – dimensions of personal and collective life – may not be available in the Romanian–Hungarian case. Data for those pillars might therefore be substituted for different statistics.

A crossborder region. Crossborder regions came into existence between Hungary and her neighbours after the political transition turn of 1989/90. Their real existence went back to the pre-war history of the countries in the Carpathian basin. After the transition, however, the hidden existence of those regions became visible. Their inhabitants – families and relatives, separated for decades by politics – received the opportunity to recreate their traditional family and community lives. Though using different services (education, health care, social care, mass communication) mostly owned by their official states, their individual and family lives remain the same, sharing similar cultures and using similar languages (Romanian and Hungarian at the Romanian–Hungarian state border). All these created a basis for a new cross-border cooperation between communities on both sides of the Romanian–Hungarian border.

Some of the cross-border regions (CBR) received legal recognition for their existence by a new blueprint called “Euroregion”. Euroregions represented the acceptance on behalf of the existing European Community and as such gave a certain official protection for common activities at the state borders. A territory that received such a legal existence was the Bihar–Bihor Euroregion (2002). (The historical “Bihar” or “Bihor” was a county established back in the 11th century under the Hungarian crown, with a majority of Romanian inhabitants in the present time; see Figure 4).

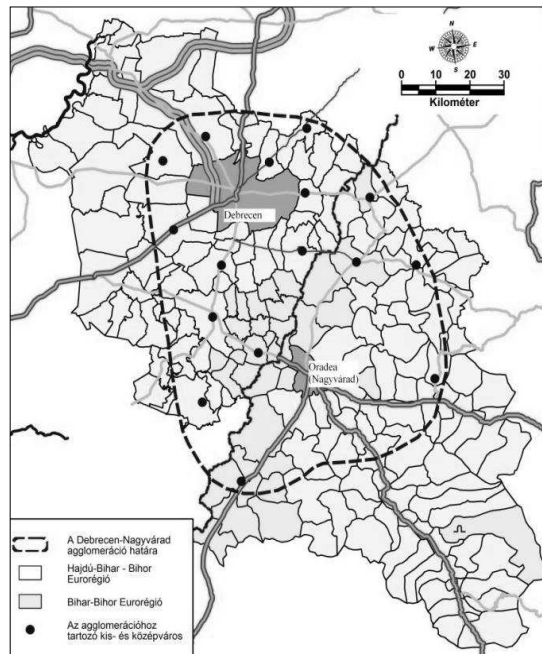


Figure 4: The Bihar-Bihar Euroregion

Source: Süli-Zakar 2011, p. 21

Figure 4 shows that the Bihar–Bihar Euroregion has been organised as a metropolitan area; Oradea on the Romanian side and Debrecen on the Hungarian side. Divided by the state border, these two metropolitan areas are geographically close to each other and would need connections for their transport. Oradea is the largest city in the Western part of Romania, while Debrecen is the second largest city of Hungary. Their permanent connections should therefore be “upgraded” from the private to the public domain. It is one of the political priorities for the regional politics today. The territory within the blue line was the first area of cooperation and acceptance; the larger part is the two sides of the historical Bihar-Bihar, which is created by two counties at the two sides of the border.

A comparative study is being conducted by a team of researchers from the University of Debrecen and the University of Oradea. The study aims to describe the LRs – their statuses and their levels – in the Bihar-Bihar Euroregion. At the same time, as part of the study, the researchers would try out the views and the approaches of CLI – DLA. If they succeed, the further study of both Romania and/or Hungary could be initiated with the aim to bring out the political forces behind the LRs on the one hand and to create a Romanian–Hungarian Map of Learning on the other.

Summary

The concept of the “learning region” (LR) became known in the early 1990s. The movement behind the concept – an alternative way of regional development – was dominant in the early 2000s. The present study examines three different existing approaches to the concept and ends up in the authors’ understanding of LR. According to them, the concept of LR can not only be applied to the highly developed regions characterised by a net of higher education, innovation and production (dimensions of “knowing” and “doing”). Rather, the concept of LR can also be applied to smaller spatial units characterised by their social networks and political movements (dimensions of “personal enrichment” and “civil society”). Until now, LR has been known and used by educational politicians and experts as an idea and a slogan. It has only recently been tested statistically. The Canadian Composite Learning Index as well as its European counterpart (European Lifelong Learning Index) shed lights to the pros and cons of such a testing. The German map of Learning – as an alternative for the official educational statistics – suggests a similar approach in Hungary and Romania.

The new understanding of LR – a shift from the most developed regions to the politically active local societies – is applied to a cross-border region of Hungary and Romania (Bihar–Bihor Euroregion). Practical rather than theoretical questions have to be solved before a comparative analysis and/or a map of LRs in a region. The researchers of the two Universities (Oreadea, Romania and Debrecen, Hungary) joined to collect the necessary data for such an analysis. The field of their case study is the cross-border region mentioned above. The objective of the study is to develop indicators for pillars 1–4 for the learning indices, however the main aim is more than that. The map of LRs of the respective countries would be an important contribution to the further understanding of the suggested concept of LR.

Notes

The authors of this paper owe thanks to Gabor Erdei, who co-authored an earlier version of this article in Hungarian and who supported the present article with his comments and remarks.

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To cite this Paper:

PRINTED: Tamás Kozma, Károly Teperics, Zoltán Tözsér & Edina Kovács: Lifelong Learning in a Cross-Border Setting: the Case of Hungary and Romania. A Quest of Concepts, Data and Research. In Gabriella Pusztai & Adrian Hatos (Eds.) *Higher Education for Regional Social Cohesion*. Hungarian Educational Research Journal (HERJ) Special Issues, 1. pp. 163–180. Budapest (Hungary): HERA.

ONLINE: Tamás Kozma, Károly Teperics, Zoltán Tözsér & Edina Kovács: Lifelong Learning in a Cross-Border Setting: the Case of Hungary and Romania. A Quest of Concepts, Data and Research. In Gabriella Pusztai & Adrian Hatos (Eds.) *Higher Education for Regional Social Cohesion*. Hungarian Educational Research Journal (HERJ) Special Issues, 1. Budapest (Hungary): HERA.
doi: 10.5911/HERJ.SPECIALISSUES1.9.
